

# Maximising Student Learning

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## Ten Ways to Improve student behaviour & engagement

Imagine you are an AFL umpire in a grand final. The scores are close, it is the final quarter and the players will do anything to create an advantage. Do you think giving meaningful looks, saying, "excuse me, I'm waiting!" loudly, giving warnings, shaking your head or looking disapproving before finally blowing the whistle and saying "I've given you enough warnings" will work? Well you are in the equivalent situation every day. You need to be clear, fast and decisive to get on with the game of learning.

### 1. Get to know them and engage them

Greet them by their name at the classroom door. Signify to them that they are coming into your domain. Survey the group's interests and histories – one easy way to do this is to construct a class CV of all the jobs, positions, achievements, & accomplishments of the entire group.

**Activities for heightening engagement** include- games, guessing games (e.g. creating a question to match the answer), 'guess a category – give one word clues until students guess the category', thoughtful & higher order questioning, wait-time, pacing, using movement, explaining why a topic is useful or interesting, engaging students in friendly debate – e.g. 2 teams on either side of the room with the rest on students in the middle shifting either way depending on how convinced they are by different arguments, relating ideas to students interests, creating novelty & providing interesting facts & anecdotes to go with information (e.g. personal stories about the author of a novel or a mathematical theory).

### 2. Instant karma is going to get you

Teaching is the career with the fastest karma. You get back what you give. Make a promise to yourself to treat people with respect all the time. Never descend to the level of yelling or using sarcasm or put-downs.

### 3. More carrots than sticks- build a culture of co-operation

Give more praise than punishment. Don't take their behaviour, personally. Make behaving well desirable. Students want you to like them. Praise them & increase the amount of feedback you give them. One way to do this is to increase the number of statements you make than begin with "I noticed..." Rather than asking what do I do if they do X it is

better to ask how can I create a classroom where these behaviours don't happen

### 4. Location, location, location

Every real estate agent knows it- location, location, location! Your proximity to students makes a difference to their behaviour. If you arrange the room so you have a barrier between yourself and your students your chances of classroom control are zilch.

Use whispers and quiet comments to students as you move around the room rather than speaking across a room.

### 5. Have high expectations

Expect all your students to do well. Let them know they are capable and that you expect that all of them will have great lives. The motto that is best for most classrooms and schools is: "Here everyone gets smart".

### 6. Run your gang

The most successful classrooms are run like gangs. The teacher is the head of the gang and welcomes members into his or her gang. Have routines. Let students know this is the way we do things here.

## 7. Develop pods

A pod is a group of 3 teachers who between them care for the learning, emotional needs of a group of students as well as being the main link point for family liaison in high schools. Ideally the 3 teachers continue with the same group- of students throughout their time at the school.

Most students will be able to relate to all 3 teachers. Some students however are unable to hear mixed news (praise as well as suggestions) from the one person. For these students we split the roles of the pod into:



The boundary rider's job is to put consequences in place. The advocate's role is to engage and support the student and to remove themselves whenever possible, from disciplinary processes. The manager's role is to oversee the process and to have the final say in the event of professional disagreements about student management.

## 8. Be clear about your standards

Choose which hills to die on- don't react to everything. If something really pushes your buttons react early. Don't wait till you are truly upset before dealing with it.

One of the most common mistakes some teachers make is they don't follow through on consequences when students make poor choices. They tend to try the "ignore" tactic way too long, hoping the behavior will just go away. Or they give chances- if you do that again... Or they try to gain a confession (or an immediate self-assessment). They threaten but don't carry through until they are frustrated and angry and the consequence becomes a punishment given with emotion and often to the whole class rather than just the offenders.

Liaise closely with students who are not performing well. Call all parents of students below a C at midterm progress reports. During phone calls about academics, be in a "how can I help" mode- NEVER in a criticizing mode.

## 9. Dead time is deadly time

Use the GET IT! Model to plan lessons and learning experiences. A successfully planned lesson helps students to succeed and keeps them busy from the moment they enter the classroom.

## 10. Use consequences proactively

Most people think that managing behaviour is about consequences for poor behaviour. Consequences are intentionally placed last in this paper because they have the least impact.

The best interventions are non-verbal.

At the start of the year let your students know the warning signs that they may be in trouble.

For example say, "Usually I will be writing in black or blue but if I pick up the red pen you will know the entire class is about to get into trouble unless your behaviour improves immediately."

Also introduce them to two – coloured, two-sided tokens eg. red and yellow. Say to them, "if I place this in front of you with the red side up, you will know that unless your behaviour improves immediately you will lose some of your next break. If I come back and turn it over to the yellow side you will know that you are still on notice but as long as you keep behaving well you have regained your break time. If you want to dispute this, talk to me about it in your break, Lesson time is for learning".

You may need to use detentions occasionally. If you do make them be on the same day as the infraction, supervise them yourself and use the time to build a positive relationship with the student. Aim to make a plan to avoid a recurrence of the situation that led to the detention.